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Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East: 1776 to the Present

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comprehensive changes in global economic activity, the global correlation of military force, and relationships among globally significant political actors are taking place in Asia. The fact that so many Asian nations rely heavily on oceanborne commerce for petroleum is but one reason why the course of these developments must depend on how the parties concerned exercise sea power. Thus, Toshi Yoshihara and James Holmes's volume of essays by leading academics on Asian nations' experiences and practices of maritime strategy is timely. Yoshihara sets a high standard for the other authors in his introduction, where he specifies issues he intends for the work to address, and identifies the key questions hanging over contemporary Asian maritime affairs with unusual clarity of thought and equally exceptional clarity of expression.

Different chapters address Yoshihara's questions from different perspectives. chapter 2 presents a broad narrative of Chinese maritime activity, while chapters 3 and 4 present detailed historical studies of Anglo-Japanese relations and the U.S. Navy's operations in the Pacific region, respectively. The book then returns to twenty-first-century concerns, with chapters on the People's Republic of China's (PRC) ongoing naval buildup, the PRC's oil tanker fleet, Indian maritime activity, Japanese maritime thought, and China's maritime relations with Southeast Asia.

All these chapters are relevant to Yoshihara's initial questions. The questions, however, raise more issues than any book could possibly address. Readers of Gabriel Collins's study of the PRC's tanker fleet, for instance, are likely to want a comparative analysis of how other Asian countries transport

their oil. Chapters on India, Japan, and Southeast Asia are invaluable, but Russia, the Republic of China, and the Republic of Korea surely deserve attention as well. Numerous authors mention Alfred Thayer Mahan, but none explore the points he raises in *The Problem of Asia and Its Effect upon International Politics* (Little, Brown, 1905). *The Problem of Asia* emphasizes the importance of Africa and the Middle East to what twenty-first-century writers might call Asia's sea lines of communication. A chapter on the PRC's trade and diplomatic activity in those regions could have been revealing, whether or not the author shares Mahan's views. Since this book could never have covered all aspects of Asian maritime strategy completely, Yoshihara might have helped readers understand its particular contribution by including a conclusion summarizing the steps the authors had taken toward that goal. Readers are, however, almost certain to find this book valuable in their own studies of sea power in Asia.

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Oren, Michael B. *Power, Faith, and Fantasy: America in the Middle East, 1776 to the Present*. New York: W. W. Norton, 2007. 800pp. \$17.95

Michael Oren's *Power, Faith, and Fantasy* is an indispensable historical account of America's encounters with the volatile Middle East. A renowned historian, Oren fills a vacuum in the literature, as most of it dates to the post-World War II era.

Oren begins by identifying the central motifs (the "golden threads") of America's involvement in the region since the

1700s. As he notes, “The most tangible and pervasive of [these] themes is power.” During the Barbary Wars, the United States Navy displayed its newfound power to good effect. The second theme is faith. He portrays this in his description of the countless American missionaries who toiled under the harshest conditions. The third theme is fantasy—that is, the region’s exotic and mysterious images and stereotypes. Consistent throughout the book is the discussion of how crucial the U.S. Navy was to the region. Naval War College readers will enjoy the insight into the Navy’s earliest ventures and missions in the Middle East.

In spite of the massive changes that have occurred in the region since 1776 or indeed over the last century—the discovery of oil, the two world wars, the Arab-Israeli conflict, the peace process, and terrorism—Oren makes a good case that today’s problems between the United States and its various Middle Eastern partners and adversaries revolve around these same intersecting threads. He emphasizes in particular the dire need to make a shift from “fantasy” to reality in U.S.–Middle East relations generally.

This extensively researched book is well written, comprehensive, and fascinating. Given our dilemmas in U.S.–Middle East relations today, policy makers and the general public alike will benefit greatly by reading it.

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Bodansky, Yossef. *Chechen Jihad: Al Qaeda's Training Ground and the Next Wave of Terror*. New York: HarperCollins, 2007. 464pp. \$27.95

The importance to the global jihad of the Chechen wars that have roiled the Caucasus region for more than fifteen years is something Western commentators on terrorism persistently underestimate. For most Western observers, the battle for Chechnya has more to do with tribal-cum-national conflicts and human rights abuses than fighting against the forces of armed radical Islam. Russian claims that it, too, is waging its own “war on terror” (a view that held currency in the United States only briefly after 9/11) now fall on deaf ears. For most people outside the former Soviet Union, the arduous Russian struggle against Chechen mujahideen has evaporated from the headlines and amounts to a forgotten war.

This is unfortunate for many reasons, not least that al-Qa‘ida considers the jihad in the Caucasus to be a major front in its global campaign. The first Chechen war (1994 to 1996) was a humiliating debacle for Moscow that resulted in the establishment of a Chechen pseudostate, which soon fell under the influence of Islamic radicalism. Al-Qa‘ida believed this to be a clear win for its cause.

The second Chechen war, which began in 1999 and coincided with the rise of Vladimir Putin, presents a much different picture. For all intents and purposes, Russia has won—Moscow has successfully reestablished its authority over most of the breakaway region. For al-Qa‘ida, by the same token, Chechnya today is a much less promising venue than it was a decade ago.

The continuing neglect of Chechnya in the “terrorism studies” canon is, therefore, a problem. Chechnya has much to teach Western counterterrorists about